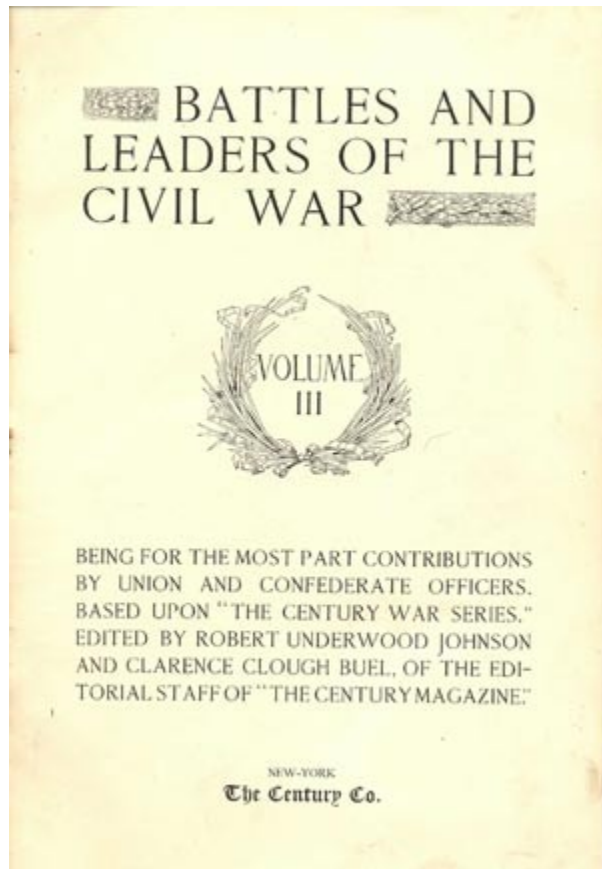


FUCKING HELL

Posted on [June 6, 2010](#) by [Lloydville](#)



John Lettiere just died. He was in his mid sixties. He suffered a mild stroke not long ago but was recovering nicely when he was diagnosed with a super-aggressive form of liver cancer which carried him off in a matter of weeks. John was a big, burly Italian-American from the Bronx, wildly profane in speech — he could fit more variations of the word “fuck” into a sentence than anyone I ever encountered. His last e-mail to me, about a month ago, consisted of a single line, in response to a question I'd asked him — “Abso-fucking-lutely!” He was wildly opinionated and loved to shove his opinions in your face in the most challenging way.

He was also one of the sweetest men I ever knew. All the aggression was bluster.

John was a high-school drop-out but exceptionally well-read — like many autodidacts he never stopped learning and studying. I met

him via a newsgroup dedicated to Bob Dylan. It was the first online community I ever became part of, and it eventually turned into a flesh-and-blood community for some of us who lived in and near New York City. Peter Stone Brown, another contributor to the group, is a singer-songwriter from Philly who occasionally plays clubs in New York. Whenever he had a gig there, the New York members of the group would convene to hear him, and so we got to know each other face to face.

The newsgroup eventually degenerated into an uncivil place and I checked out of it, but I stayed in touch with many of the friends I'd made there, and many of them have now re-bonded on Facebook. (As Peter points out, John, who worked as a computer security expert, would never have joined any enterprise as insecure as Facebook.)

At one point, when I still lived in New York, John and I discovered that we were both Civil War fanatics and obsessive collectors of books on that subject. Like me, John first got interested in the Civil War through the works of Bruce Catton, and we both owned copies of *Battles and Leaders Of the Civil War*, a fairly rare four-volume series of collected articles about the war by participants, published some years after the conflict ended. A few years ago he wrote me about how he got his copy of *Battles and Leaders*:

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Let me tell you a story on how I acquired them:

I am a book fiend.

Back in the late 60s, me and a friend would visit book row down in the East Village a few times a month. I loved those old book stores, with their old musty shelves, bins and boxes of old used books. We'd spend the whole day looking, it was like

an adventure. Now the only thing left is The Strand.

Some days we'd find nothing, and then there were days where we cleaned up, and brought back bags of old books, comics and magazines. And some times finding that one gem of a book in all those piles, WOW! Like a copy of Men And Things I Saw in the Civil War by Gen. James F. Rusling (1914) for 2 bucks.

Anyway I digress . . .

I was on the Grand Concourse in the Bronx one night, and stopped off at a local book store as was usual. In those days I could never go past a book store without browsing its wares. Killed I don't know how many thousands of hours doing that. Anyway, I was going through their discount bins, and what do I see? Battles and Leaders, all four volumes. I couldn't believe my fucking luck. Only thing was they cost 20 bucks plus tax, and all I had on me was 9.

I was with a friend at the time, and asked him to lend me the balance till I got home, not more than 15 minutes by bus from where the store was. But the prick refused. I was so pissed I almost strangled the bastard. After I finally calmed down, I tried to reason with him, but no, he wasn't gonna budge.

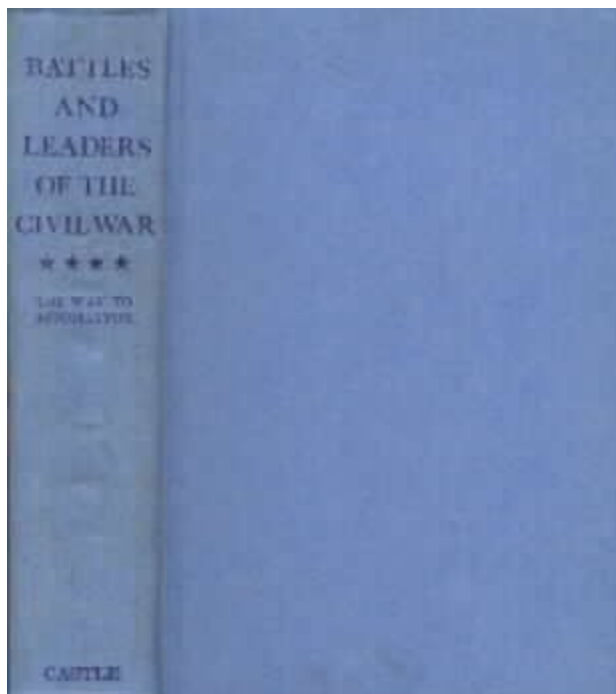
Now what the fuck am I gonna do? I knew I wasn't leaving that fucking store without those books. So now I go to a candy store around the corner that we'd frequented, run by two nut jobs, Pete and Larry. I went in to buy a pack of cigarettes, and an egg cream, and make a phone call home to see if one of my sisters could bring me some money to buy the books. Spoke to my mom to explain the situation, but neither of them were home.

Now here's the freaky thing — Larry, one of the owners of the candy store, overhears the conversation and says: hey don't sweat it, I'll lend you the money. You could've flattened me with a feather off J. E. B. Stuart's hat. As it turned out both Pete and Larry were Civil War re-enactors.

Who would've guessed?

We knew these guy only as candy store owners, where we'd go in, buy cigs and a soda and bullshit baseball, football, and hockey. Anyway, they didn't have such a high opinion of Catton. Not that they knocked him, but as Larry told me: there's a lot of other books that were better. Needless to say I got the books and a whole lot more because of these two candy store guys.

I'm guessing that the edition John found is the same one I found in a New York City used bookstore when I was in my twenties — a reprint from the 1950s, illustrated below:



This story is pure John — the act of unexpected kindness done to him was the sort of thing he loved doing for others. The unruly passion for books was one of the chief things I liked about him. He was a good man, and good company, as well — two attributes that don't always go together in the same person.

Fucking hell, John — I can't believe you're gone.